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AUTHOR Valentine, Tamara M.
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ABSTRACT

This study examined the speech act of agreement and disagreement in the ordinary conversation of English-speakers in India. Data were collected in natural speech elicited from educated, bilingual speakers in cross-sex and same-sex conversations in a range of formal and informal settings. Subjects' ages ranged from 19 to about 60. Five agreement strategies were analyzed: (1) direct expression of agreement or stated agreement components; (2) building on the previous speaker's turn; (3) uttering partial and complete repetitions of components in the previous turn; (4) delaying; and (5) hedging. Four disagreement strategies were examined: (1) explicit statement of disagreement or stated disagreement components; (2) softening of disagreement with softened negative statements, honorifics, apologies; (3) delaying; and (4) hedging. These patterns are explained, with examples, and discussed in light of research on politeness behavior. It is noted that while these strategies are appropriate in their own cultural context, potential for misunderstanding increases in cross-cultural contexts, and to some extent in cross-gender interaction. Contains 26 references. (MSE)

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When "no" means "yes": Agreeing and disagreeing in Indian English discourse*

Tamara M. Valentine
University of South Carolina at Spartanburg

Introduction. The study of speech acts remains central to pragmatics especially to the study of cross-cultural pragmatics. Some theorists (Austin 1962, Searle 1969, 1975) claim that these notions operate by universal pragmatic principles. They argue that such pragmatic tendencies are governed by the universal principles of cooperation and politeness (Brown and Levinson 1978, Leech 1983). Yet, cultures demonstrate varying degrees of interactional styles, leading to different pragmatic behaviors. Interactional sociolinguistic studies show that a difference in pragmatic conventions can lead to breakdowns in intercultural and interethnic communication and to cross-cultural conflict (Gumperz 1978, Hall and Hall 1990, Tannen 1993).

Politeness Theory. Primary to the politeness theory (Brown and Levinson 1978) is the notion of **face**, the public image each individual wants to display. The notion of face interrelates to the basic cultural notions community members value: honor, virtue, shame, personhood, religious beliefs, among other self-esteeming notions. Similarly, in relation to the age, sex, social power and social distance of participants, the social setting, the topic, and other social factors, face plays a prominent role in the strategies the participants use to initiate, negotiate and continue conversation.

Face consists of two kinds of desires or face-wants by the participants: **negative face** and **positive face.** Negative face is the desire to be unimpeded by one's actions, and positive face is the desire to be approved of. Negative face is the

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universal human need to be liked and admired. It is the want for freedom of action and freedom from imposition. Negative face is the need not to be imposed on. Positive face, in contrast, is the universal human desire to have one's wants recognized and taken account of, to be appreciated and approved of, to have one's views heard, and to have accepted one's right to hold such views.

Politeness, then, can be defined as satisfying the face wants of others; speakers lose face, save face, or strengthen face. Linguistically, politeness is carried out in many different ways. In each culture, the kinds of face needs can be different and so can the means by which face recognition is expressed in words and actions. But, "the mutual knowledge of members' face...and the social necessity to orient oneself to it in interaction are universal" (Brown and Levinson 1978:62).

That cultures develop their own distinct interactional styles is recurrent in sociolinguistic studies on speech acts and speech genres (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989, Wierzbicka 1985). American English speakers are more direct than Greek speakers (Tannen 1982). New York Jewish speakers exhibit a high level of involvement style of talk (Tannen 1981). Even in studies examining the performance of certain speech acts in the indigenized varieties of English, researchers find that cross-cultural and cross-linguistic differences exist in the way the same speech act is performed in different languages. Indic language studies (Y. Kachru 1982, Pandharipande 1982), suggest that culturally determined thought patterns influence the structure of discourse in specific languages. K. Sridhar (1991) finds that requesting strategies in Indian English are different from those in native varieties of English. Indian English users from more traditional backgrounds are more likely to use direct speech for requests than those from more Westernized backgrounds. Y. Kachru (1991) even suggests that to formulate a socially-realistic theoretical framework for speech acts in world Englishes, the approaches of speech

act theory, contrastive analysis, sociolinguistics, and ethnography of communication need to be consulted jointly. Each framework separately is not adequate to account for verbal interaction in an indigenized variety of English.

Similarly, within the model of the politeness theory, many scholars examine whether certain patterns of language usage are attributed to members of powerful/non-powerful groups and whether these patterns can cause conflict in communication. One relevant social parameter that raises questions is that of gender: Is there variation in politeness levels due to the sex of the speaker and the sex of the addressee? Does the degree of politeness vary in cross-sex and same sex situations? Brown (1980) argues that women in a Mayan community in Mexico are more sensitive to the face needs of others. Valentine (1991) suggests that female speakers of Indian English use a greater number of cooperative discourse strategies so as not to threaten face.

Agreement and Disagreement. Brown and Levinson discuss several strategies speakers use to achieve positive and negative politeness. The strategies of positive politeness involve claiming "common ground" by conveying something as admirable or interesting, claiming in-group membership, or claiming common point of view, shared opinion, or mutual attitude. One strategy of positive politeness and of claiming common ground with someone is to seek agreement. Across different situations, whatever the topic, participants orient to agreeing with one another to create a comfortable, supportive, reinforcing, sociable, like-minded atmosphere. When two strangers comment on the state of the weather or make small talk at a service encounter, they are setting up an agreeable arrangement. When a speaker exclaims "yes, yes, yes, it's very good and very simple thing" as speaker B does in example 13, he does not wish to say "no, no, no, it's very bad and very difficult thing". Participants work in concert to create a cooperative spirit.

As some research indicates, the speech act of agreement and disagreement is expressed in different ways in different cultures; such interactional differences often can lead to an unfortunate consequence of style clash and miscommunication. In Burundi (Albert 1972), for example, the second speaker may say "Yes. I definitely agree," then state their own opinion in complete contradiction to the first speaker. In gender communication studies, American English speaking women signal they are listening by using "yeah" to mean "I'm with you, I follow", whereas men tend to say "yeah" only when they agree (Maltz and Borker 1982). And where Americans use "single-account" arguments, whereby a speaker presents one account per turn and supports one position, then draws a conclusion, a Japanese argument includes both supporting and contradicting language within a turn; to a Japanese speaker, an inclusive conclusion where contradictions are integrated into the argument is preferred over a single argumentative position (Watanabe 1993).

Data. This paper looks at the language of the ordinary conversation of speakers of English in India. I collected the data in India over the past five years. I elicited the natural speech of English from educated, bilingual speakers in cross-sex and same sex conversations in a range of formal and informal settings. The subjects' ages ranged from 19 year old college students to 60-ish year old working and non-working men and women. In this paper, I examine the strategies of agreeing and disagreeing that these speakers produced in the taped Indian English discourse and discuss the implications for teaching in multilingual contexts in India.

Agreement Strategies in Indian English. An Indian English speaker agrees with the point of view or statement of the previous speaker in many ways. The strategies can be grouped in the following manner: agreement expressed with direct expression of agreement or stated agreement components (A), by building upon the previous speaker's turn (B), by uttering partial and complete repetitions of

components in the previous turn (C), and by delaying (D) or by hedging (E).

The use of direct agreement components in response to a previous turn (A) commits the Indian English speaker to actual agreement with the content of the first speaker's utterance. The turn begins with expressions such as **"I agree with you", "That's true", "Right, yeah", "Absolutely, that's what I say, that's right", and "I'm in line with what he's saying"** before the turn continues. Examples 1-3 illustrate this strategy.[1] Speakers are forthright with their agreement to the content of the previous speaker's utterance.

A. Direct Agreement

1. fA: it sounds wonderful when you talk about it. It's very difficult...
   fB: **Yeah, ma'am it's like she was saying** she would like to be a spinster. It's something. It takes a lot of guts to say that in public. And if any other girls out here probably in a gathering of ten or twelve people with six to seven guys saying, you'll see the guys doing this, okay.

2. fA: So if you had a problem you would go to your male friend?
   mB: Actually, it would depend on the kind of problem I might even go and consult my father for that matter, **but yeah certainly if I have something a problem of a kind** which I can discuss with my best friend I think **yeah sure I would certainly seek his help** in that case yeah, in that event.
   mC: **I'm in line with what he's saying.** In India the social circumstances are such that they had been now. Of course women are coming out of their... but more or less the pattern is that there is more between the youngsters. I mean the adolescents. Now the coming of the open society we are coming into contact with more male-female...but throughout our for centuries we have been more had been this discriminations all the time.

3. mA: there's a vast difference between the relations in the urban areas and the rural areas of India. In the rural areas of India, in the rural areas the norms and rules of interaction is much more very conservative.
   mB: **absolutely true.** In fact Venketeswara College, New Delhi is certainly not India. It's certainly not India. In the India, the real India is in the villages and there I think male and female relations is of a kind where there are a lot of restrictions on coming into close contact.

One aspect of such agreement is the **preferred response** to the initial

utterance. Speakers set up their speech acts in such a way that to avoid face troubles, one particular response is preferred to be the easiest, simplest, and most expected. A preferred response is one which is framed for a positive answer. Speaker A in example 1 sets up for speaker B's positive response. In example 2, speaker B feels the need to answer A's question. He hedges in the first couple of lines, then finally sends an agreeing response. Example 3 shows an **upgraded agreement**, the use of an intensifier modifying the prior element (**absolutely true**), which is a stronger evaluative term than the prior one. Other examples of upgraded agreements in Indian English include "women are respected **very gently, very nicely, in maximum 90%** of the streets", **"absolutely no problem"**, **"very true, very true"**, **"wide, wide variety"**, **"totally different"**, etc. An upgrade can occur as a part of a series of upgraded evaluative turns as well. Example 9 below illustrates this among three female speakers: **common, very common, really common.**

Another strategy to express agreement is the building upon the previous speaker's turn (B). Examples 4 and 5 show respondent agreement; the second speaker includes additional information, reasons, and details to stress common ground and show support of the previous speaker's talk. In example 5, to show mutual agreement, both participants build upon the same point of view. Not missing a beat between turns, they supply an uninterrupted listing of what they understand to be the laughable characteristics expected of a potential Indian bride as advertised in an Indian matrimonial. Agreement is established by saying the same thing but expanding the content of the prior position. Male speakers do not seem to build upon each other's turn in this way, rather they tend to show agreement by talking parallel to each other, stating similar content and attitude using different words (examples 10 and 11); female participants tend to build agreement in a collaborative way over a number of turns.

B. Agreement: building upon another's turn

4. fA: Why do men like to talk to women so much and why do women like to talk to women so much? And does that happen in India do you think as well?
   fB: **Yeah, it does** I think the main reason for this is because women are very good listeners **like you said** they will always listen to you, and they will be sympathetic, they're more gentle, I mean if you go and start talking to a man about your problem he'll just probably ask you to act like a man or be a man that you're supposed to be. [to be a man means] not to let your emotions get the better of you and not get emotional and be cool and analytical, practical.

   fC: **Probably another thing** would be that women try to keep themselves in that position and view things from the other person's point of view. They keep their options open. They're not, **I won't say ma'am,** I can't generalize it, they're not so opinionated. They would definitely if they feel that you have some point and they would definitely try to keep themselves in their position and then they give you a point of view instead of just being rash.
   fA: do you agree with that?
   mD: **I don't know what to say** because my best friend is very much a male and he listens to me whenever I have something to say. I don't know how much this is empirically verifiable or what but then in India I particularly I feel it is generally the norm or whatever that the maybe generally has a male as a very best friend **I'm not saying that it is true** throughout. There are exceptions but I think that is the way it is because maybe the social circumstances, yeah.

5. fA: arranged marriages?
   fB: ma'am you see them the Indian matrimonials, it's so absurd. I really laugh at all this. **A woman who's fair, who's tall, convent educated, beautiful, educated**
   fC: **beautiful, now who's educated good family**
   fB: **ha, and then she's willing to do the household chores. She's willing to go out and work, take care of the kids, very articulative, can talk in public, well they want everything and they're not willing to change themselves a bit.**

Repetition (C) serves the function of positive face and sends a metamessage of involvement. Repetition has a wide range of varied functions in conversation (Tannen 1989). Repeating indicates one's response to another's utterance, establishes acceptance and agreement, and gives evidence of one's own participation.

The process of repeating to stress emotional agreement seems highly conventionalized in Indian languages. In a study examining the relationship between particular syntactic strategies in Indian languages and politeness, Subbarao, et.al. (1991) state that one way to achieve positive politeness in these languages is to repeat a part of what the other interlocutor said. Elliptical repetitions help to please the positive face of the hearer and to reduce any uncertainty. This strategy is so common that often the interlocutor's repetitions may not be relevant to the point being made, hence for a non-Indian hearer, the Indian speaker is viewed as repetitive and inconsistent. In examples 6-9, agreement is shown by the respondent repeating part of a previous statement or complete sentences. Among female speakers, often such repeats go on for a couple of turns to indicate emphatic agreement (examples 8 and 9).

C. Agreement: repetition

6. mA: It's going to be **very difficult** to find somebody who thinks exactly the way I do.
   fB: It's **very difficult** to say
   mA: **very difficult** since we come to a co-ed school, a co-ed college. We meet so many people of the opposite sex and interact with them on a day to day basis.

7. mA: generalizing is rather difficult because experience would be different from person to person
   mB: **that's what I say**
   mA: I favor to talk from my own experience. I will say it's 50-50 anything y'know that you can talk of the domestic issues, or the matter of sharing responsibility, taking decisions,. It's all very **jointly** done.
   mC: **it's jointly** y'see

8. fA: **Men are not helping at all.**
   fB: **Men are not helping at all.**
   fC: **They are not.**

9. fA: So dating is **common** nowadays.
   fB: Yeah. This is **very common.**
   fC: **Very common.**
   fB: **Really common.** And in this level well we are doing research. This is

not anything very strange. We are bound to do all these things because we have to go outside frequently....

When participants feel they are being asked to agree with some point of view with which they may not necessarily want to agree, they often find themselves in the position of showing partial agreement. Such agreement expressions appear in delayed positions (D) and withheld positions (E) of a turn. In the Indian English examples below, the respondents delay agreement with the previous speaker's comment to the end of the turn (in examples 10 and 11) or withhold the agreement until later within the turn (in example 12). It is not uncommon for the speaker at the outset to start the turn with a reluctant and hesitant tone, then agree with the prior speaker's position by using a direct agreement expression. In example 30, speaker B's turn is abundant with hesitancy markers and hedges, such as **"I don't think", "I'm not saying", maybe..."** before the speaker emphatically states **"that is the one that I generally see it most often"**.

D. Prefacing: delayed agreement

10. mA: ...Here it's not like that here you're very much your mother's child. Y'see, there's a difference...so that thing should be kept in mind I think it's very important.

mB: and also this concerning the interaction between one sex and another opposite. In the joint family system which we have of course, there's a transition into a nuclear family but in the joint family there has been a lot of interaction between me, like brother and sister, uncle. But well in the this transition into a nuclear family, it's not so sudden we still have that feeling of joint that we are all close together. There may be nuclear families but what has happened that in now this thing we had a joint family now we because of jobs and other reasons we migrated. One is in Delhi one is in Calcutta one..but we occasionally meet like everyone's, we are ought to meet otherwise it's it will not be proper certainly. We try and meet each so that we keep our bond. It's a feeling of having one. **That's true we still have a very strong support system**

fC: **I think that is exactly the point that I was trying to make**

11. mA: I come from a very traditional family. Actually my mother went to a convent she went to LSR which is a women's college. Even my dad he was in Allahabad he went to a college which was only for guys. And so,

but they try and be very broad-minded about it with my friends, they try their best.

mB: But even in my family we are from the Brahmo family which originally when there was this renaissance in India this Brahmo this thing they were the first liberal minded. Even that tradition has been followed by my grandfather, a very broad-minded people, but we're broad-minded and liberal, not like the Western this thing but broad-minded and liberal in the Indian circumstance. They can be broad-minded and liberal but keeping the norms of what the Indian norms which must be followed otherwise you'll be ostracized. That is true.

E. Agreement: hedging agreement

12. fA: So if you had a problem you would go to your male friend?

mB: Actually, it would depend on the kind of problem. I might even go and consult my father for that matter, but yeah certainly if I have something a problem of a kind which I can discuss with my best friend I think yeah sure I would certainly seek his help in that case, yeah, in that event.

Disagreement Strategies in Indian English. As I mentioned earlier, speakers produce talk with concern for face and agreement factors. Some acts, such as agreeing, reporting, and informing, are more likely to be perceived as non-face-threatening, whereas disagreeing and arguing may threaten face. A speaker threatens the hearer's positive face when the speaker accuses, insults, or reprimands, interrupts a turn, changes topic, or disagrees, challenges or rejects. Those oriented to disagreeing establish an uncomfortable, unpleasant, threatening, offensive, argumentative mood. It is not that Indian English speakers do not show disagreement in conversation, but that Indian English speakers work harder to support positive face by agreeing than risk threatening face by disagreeing.

Like agreement strategies, the ways a respondent disagrees with or indicates opposition to the point of view or statement of the previous speaker can be grouped in the following manner: disagreement expressed with explicit statements of disagreement or stated disagreement components (A), by softening the disagreement with softened negative statements, honorifics, apologies, etc. (B), and

by delaying (C) or by hedging (D).

A strong disagreement is one in which a speaker utters an evaluation which is directly contrastive with the prior evaluation. Such disagreement becomes strong when it occurs in turns containing exclusively disagreement components and does not appear in conjunction with agreement components. That is, the respondent makes it clear that she/he holds different points of view, e.g., **"I don't agree"**, **"That is not what I believe"**. Examples 13 and 14 are illustrations of strongly stated disagreements. Speaker C in 13 states "I think I hold a different view" and supports his argument with disagreement elements. In example 14, speaker B simply says "ne", no, **"it's only in metropolitan cities"**. Such forceful dissent rarely occurs in the discourse data under consideration.

A. Direct Disagreement

13. fA: so you think that is good that women are coming into the fold?
mB: **yes, yes, yes, it's very good and very simple thing** which we observe everyday. That for upbringing children we used to just to hire tutor and put the children with them, okay, so take care of just the study of children, and then in some cases men used to take care the...but now since the women, housewives, are quite educated so they take care about them, their homework and childrens are doing very well not because of their father, not because of their tutor but because of the support they are getting from the mother. So, it's a tremendous change. So it applies everywhere. So they are taking part in the house also, when they are working, then they are taking part in the management function also, offices. So it's good in every respect.
mC: **I think I hold a different view here.** Everybody is talking on the woman taking the responsibility and that there are two words: responsibility and authority. **I will differentiate.** I think if you go to the history of Indian society, it is the womans who has always taken more responsibility. Then again the question is: are they given the authority?..They are getting the authority or they are snatching the authority, **they are different thing.** But still the Indian woman does not have authority but is a question of now saying they are taking more responsibility. **Wrong** they have always been taking more responsibility. The whole responsibility of running the family has been with the woman. That's my experience of even in the working classes, if the both the partners are working. It is the woman who is getting more responsibility of running

the household as her matlab professional life and all that.

mD: maybe they have become less responsible now.

mC: **no, I won't say** because y'know if the man I go from my office back. I will not worry whether the lunch dinner is ready or not but my wife when she comes back from office she will have to see that dinners is ready. And there's question that they are taking more responsibility now is **wrong**. They have always been taking the responsibility if you go to the village setup of our houses you will see the manfolk either they will be gambling or they will be posing around...

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mB: maybe they have become less responsible now.

mD: **no, I won't say** because y'know if the man I go from my office back. I will not worry whether the lunch dinner is ready or not but my wife when she comes back from office she will have to see that dinners is ready. And there's question that they are taking more responsibility now is **wrong**. They have always been taking the responsibility if you go to the village setup of our houses you will see the manfolk either they will be gambling or they will be posing around..

14. mA: well it is everywhere. It is everywhere. If you take the big cities that both have to help each other with the responsibilities then you're getting hands like servants

mB: **ne**, it's only I think Ashok it's only in metropolitan cities. When we talk of these things we normally...

In Indian English discourse, most disagreement is couched in the manner of softeners, i.e., lessening the impact of the disagreement to come. Early expressions alert the hearer that the speaker is going to state her/his idea and disagree with the preceding comment: **"Yes, but, I won't say", "I wouldn't totally say that", "I don't**

know what to say", "I'm not saying", and "I don't think". Delays, prefaces, clarifications, and even questions such as "So don't you think that's hypocritical?" (example 29) are other instances of weakened disagreements. Softening strategies of disagreement suggest that the speaker does not take full responsibility for the belief of the statement. In example 4 above, speaker D softens his disagreement with "I don't know what to say," then humbles his position with statements suggesting that what he is claiming might not be "empirically verifiable" and other back-down statements; he again softens his statement: "I'm not saying that it is true". Also, example 15 below, shows the respondent first softening the disagreement with "well ma'am I won't say I was treated differently but" then uses contrastive "yeah" for agreement.

B. Disagreement: softened disagreement strategies

15. fA: [Were you treated differently?]
    fB: **Well ma'am I won't say I was treated differently but yeah** in spite of saying that I have very broad-minded parents and all there are certain areas in the house that you do accept after when my mother's cooking you lay down the table you wind it up okay my brother will probably go down and keep the car back and his bike back. But the dusting and all is it comes to me.

In example 16, the use of the "no" tag functions as a softener of criticism or disagreement. That the respondent introduces her disagreement or correction with "no", and then ends it with the softener tag "no", illustrates that the speaker is expressing concern for the addressee's negative face wants, therefore, weakening her first forceful "no".

16. fA: Do you think that's [male dominance] changing or that will change?
    fB: no, that won't change because it is we have to I mean go according to the male supremacy I mean we can't go our own way
    fC: no, **but nowadays I think it is changing, no?**

Politeness is shown in Indian languages by using kinship and other address

forms rather than by naming the person. Honorifics serve as strategies of deference, as well as act as an indication of impersonalization. In examples 15 and 17, **ma'am** is used by college students to their professors to minimize the force of the act and to soften the disagreeing tone. This form indicates not only the differential social status of each participant but reduces face-threatening acts. Similarly, to satisfy the negative face wants of the male speaker, female speaker B in example 18, apologies for her intrusion into the all male conversation: **"if I may interrupt for a minute here"**, before she disagrees with one of the discussants on eve-teasing.

17. fA: **But ma'am** children calling things, their parents, and my mother slapped me and if
fB: no, no, that is let us go for the good points, not the bad points even here the things are like that...no even here things happen so many. But it may not be to that extent...
fA: **Ma'am** that is not possible in our culture and it's
fB: It is possible my dear I have seen so many years to go through. It will be possible provided girls really come out.
fA: **Ma'am** we have a habit of finding midway

18.mA: What it is eve-teasing, also we cannot y'know say it is a right thing,...but yes it will be there for how many years, for 2-3 years of one's life y'know. So, it is not a matter of great concern. It's okay if they have to live with thing and nowadays children they can easily take care of everything themselves. They can y'know fight their own battles, they do not interfere, or because they have that much maturity by various communication, television, everything is so they get educated on all the things how to take care of everything. So that...
fB: **If I may interrupt for a minute here.** y'know, I'm not in the inner group, but none of you have had daughters....

Guided by the politeness principle, when an Indian English speaker wants to disagree, the speaker tries to conceal the force of disagreement. The final set of examples of disagreement (C and D) shows the strategies of using indirect forms of speech, non-confrontational language, delays, prefacing, and other hedging maneuvers as acts to reduce threat to face.

Many speech acts, whether they are statements, questions, or requests, are expressed using indirect forms or delays to avoid the loss of face for speaker and hearer. In example 19, speaker B does not immediately answer the question: **"Do you offer to help your wife?"** until the end of his turn: **"But not readily forthcoming."** Feeling compelled to answer the question he does answer it but first he prefaces his disagreement with the good deeds he does or has done around the house and his commitments outside the home.

In example 20, speaker B disagrees by hedging her answer, first by using the polite honorific address: **"ma'am".** Before disagreeing with the previous idea, however, she provides background information on career goal plans similar to those voiced by the previous speaker and what brought her to the conclusion that she wants a family. The main point is postponed toward the end. A common strategy among the female speakers is the act of first affirming what the previous speaker said by acknowledging or repeating what was said, then continuing on.

C. Prefacing: delayed disagreement

19. fA: But if she [your wife] doesn't need your assistance would you offer?
    mB: Well earlier y'know it this is a matter of my own responsibility and other things y'know which come into your life like y'know the children's education, the office, y'know certain things you carry home which you can't do at office have changed things a little bit. So, five-six years ago, I would volunteer like I would just go in and say "can I do this for you?" and things like that. Now I don't think it's as it's that way any longer. But if she asks me "can you just come in? gimme a hand"? well, I do it. **But not readily forthcoming.**

D. Disagreement: hedging

20. fA: my family. Of course, they wants me to get married, they pressurize me, but I think they've got to know by now, that when I am adamant at some point, nothing can budge me
    fB: **Well, ma'am to be very frank** 'til two years, since I was in tenth, yeah two years ago, three years later. I was nearly on the same track as Shamuna was and a very career oriented person. But after that I recently I had the opportunity to go abroad sort of one month workshop. I really talked to people out there, I read more of magazines, and I came back I read more,

interacted more. And I find that I definitely would want to pursue a career, pursue a career in a field that interests me but definitely I would like to have a family, too. And then I think that's when the problem comes in, too, that you start expecting more. I could have a problem with my husband on that issue. I'm prepared for it. **But, then I would definitely like to have a family. Yeah.**

When "no" means "yes". Cases where both agreement and disagreement components exist within the same turn are called **contradiction.** Because agreements and disagreements are contrastive units it seems puzzling to place both forms within one turn. It might be acceptable to show agreement + disagreement in an utterance such as **yes, but** because the respondent first supports and acknowledges the previous statement then gives her/his own view, but to disagree then agree, saying **"no, I understand"** is more unexpected.

In examples 21 and 22, each respondent weighs both sides of an issue, trying not to commit to one position. Each participant provides supporting and contradicting positions within a turn. In example 21, speaker A weighs all sides of the issue of an ideal wife and provides reasons for his position. At the outset, he states that a lady should be interested in the house, then states **"but, at the same time"** she has to manage a career (working). Then he returns to the lady's role as a mother. He concludes with his position that an ideal wife is one who balances both career and family. His final comments about **"females' acceptance of their double duty"** however, are met with dissent and the female respondent forcefully disagrees with him. Speaker A responds to B's disagreement with a softening dissent **"ah well I wouldn't say that"** and backs down, averting the danger of a full-blown argument.

A. Weighing both sides

21. [ideal wife?]

mA: to me I think it would mean a lady who would certainly **be interested in the activities of the house** because again in the Indian context you have to do you have to look after your children for quite some time. **But at the same time,** I think the Indian wife, I think has a very important and very difficult job to do. She has to **manage two fronts** at the same time.

[yeah] because of modernization you find women, y'know going out, working nowadays, and and that does happen in most middle-class families now. Which is a quite a big number. But then you will also find that largely now of course y'know not to say that the husband are not at all helping them at all I think the major part of procreation growth of child development is played by the mother in India. There is no doubt about that and I think if somebody could balance the two well would I think be the ideal Indian wife. Absolutely, because both are important. And I think even, y'know the females are angry about this. I think that most even accept this, yeah. They accept that it is a part of their female

fB: most of them accept it because they have no other choice except to accept it.

mA: ah well I wouldn't say that. Well, most of them don't maybe I'm not saying everybody's liberal in our society. But there are many women who love to do it. So they feel that "yeah it is my job and I should do it".

In example 22, speaker B disagrees with A's statement that an Indian man living abroad is displaying hypocrisy when he returns to India to marry an Indian woman. Speaker B states that he is not against arranged marriage nor is he against romance marriage, yet in the following line he thinks his own marriage might be arranged by his parents He concludes that there are demerits to both types of marriage.

22. fA: It's very difficult to then to actually expect I know even people who staying abroad but they'll come to India to get married which is the height of hypocrisy in my case.

mB: Well, I wouldn't totally say it is the height of hypocrisy, I would rather say not really looking into the social background. I'm not totally against arranged marriage, not to say that I would say I'd like somebody who is following romance. I feel if there's a father who can choose a girl for me, and if I'm not involved already with somebody whom he thinks should be the ideal wife and then we meet for some time and we decide to get married I think it's perfect. And it has proved right. I think there are demerit to both arranged marriage and falling in love and marriage.

According to Indian English speakers, weighing both sides of an issue strengthens one's position, not weakens it. To choose one point over another

devalues the argument. It is better to ask "In what way do I agree, and in what way do I disagree". In other words, weighing both sides, does not open the conversation to confrontation. In example 21 above, speaker A is not headed for a disagreeing comment by speaker B until he digresses from weighing the "two fronts" of an ideal wife. In the Indian English discourse under discussion, speakers use this strategy to such a degree that speakers go to great lengths to hide their point of view on a matter, whether it is to agree or to disagree. Speakers weigh both sides, modify their positions, and include details to minimize the risk of disagreement and maximize the desirable outcome of agreement. Non-Indians, however, interpret this as "beating around the bush" and "not getting to the point", another cause for misjudgment and misevaluation in interethnic communication.

Including both agreement and disagreement components within one turn also appears in the contradicting act of **no** meaning **yes** as illustrated in examples 23-25. In these examples the respondent starts the turn with a negative "no". (For non-Indians **no** signals denial and disagreement and what is expected to follow is an expansion of negative.) In 23, Speaker B comments that "wife abuse **is common in rural families**", Speaker C agrees **No, it's common.**

B. ***Contradiction: "no" means "yes"***

23. f A: Do you think it (wife abuse) is common?
fB: In India? In rural families this is common.
fC: **No, it's common.** Very much common even in very literate families.

24. fA: So in your family were you treated differently from your brothers in other ways?
fB: **No, not in other ways, but yeah yes I was.** They didn't allow me.

25. fA: But, ma'am. In India women aren't bothered to think she is the one responsible for taking the maintaining the financial status the whole responsibility is on the men...
fB: **No, that is a time that changed.**

Examples 26-28, are similar instances where in order to reduce a face threatening situation, the respondent utters **no** then provides a toned down explanation for her/his viewpoint. Each time a forceful disagreement is displayed as a response the speaker utters **no** and downplays her/his position.

In example 26, speaker A, who is disagreeing with speaker B, expresses a disagreeing tone with the speaker by addressing speaker A by his first name **"Ramesh"** and presenting a sexist scenario which Ramesh fits. Speaker B expresses direct agreement **"agreed"** then utters, **"But, no, no, no..."** Agreement components can occur as disagreement prefaces. Speaker A, too, responds **"no, I making..."** The first speakers, when hearing disagreement, go to the trouble of retracting their position and softening the earlier statements uttered. Indian speakers would rather say "yes, but" than a blatant "no". Examples 27 and 28 are further illustrations that clearly show how the respondents do not want to be misunderstood or to appear to be opposing in their views. Speaker A in example 27 seems to get flustered when she realizes her view is being opposed.

Back downs occur when respondents potentially disagree. In such cases, the speakers are headed for disagreement but through backing down strategies, the disagreement is mitigated or softened. In examples 29-30, when the speaker finds that the argument she/he is presenting is not met with approval, the speaker backdowns, e.g., **"I'm not saying", "maybe I'm not correct".**

C. Contradiction: Back downs: saving face

26. mA: But then another issues, **Ramesh** suppose you are running a temperature of 99 and 100 and low grade temperature of 99 and 100 and if your wife is running a same temperature. Suppose between the two I will say wife will still manage with the household job and you will lie on the bed. That is
    mB: **agreed. But, no, no, no** the point, the point, **Ashok** let me
    mA: **no,** I making

27. fA: I think it should not be there dowry. It should not be there but it is more in the rural areas and in some of the family.
fB: In urban areas also. You can't say it's only in rural areas.
fA: **ne, ne, ne, ne, ne,** ki matlab it's mostly in the rural areas but then mostly prevailing in the urban areas also.

28. mA: Decisions, that's what I said, responsibility and decision making are two different things. Decision making is what? decision making is you sit together and make a decision okay. You will do it.
fB: But the question is of sharing the workload.
mA: **No, no,** I'll elaborate on it the responsibility. I go home and let's say my wife is not well or she needs a hand. Well, I'll give my hand y'know in the matter of cooking, assisting her in the kitchen and going to the shop, getting vegetables, taking children out or sitting with them.

29. f A: ...So don't you think that is hypocritical?
mB: No, I don't think so, because an Indian wherever he goes will have his Indian values in himself, y'see, and that might be a very important fact in deciding his wife. If I go abroad I might not fall in love with an Indian girl not because I'm hypocritical but because I might not find a girl who is in congruence with my values.
fA: You will not fall in love with a Western woman?
mB: **I'm not saying, ha,** it's just an example, let's not take
fA: I'm just trying to make a point.

30. f B: Will the man ever have responsibility in the home?
mD: He should.
fA: Should, but does he now?
mB: I don't think. They are sharing that much despite of the best of the enlightenment I don't think it's my...y'see, I'm not saying individuals and all that but generally that is the situation. See, **maybe I'm not correct you can correct me** but that is the situation that I generally see it most often.

Conclusion. Studies within the framework of interactional sociolinguists by Gumperz, Tannen, Kachru, and other scholars show that within the context of cross-cultural and cross-ethnic communication, the most subtle linguistic cues ranging from the placement of stress, to the rhetorical structure of argument, to styles of involvement, can differ not only between language varieties but between varieties of the same language as well. Moreover, how these cues are interpreted

can differ with results of misevaluation and misjudgment between participants.

What this means then is that each speech community holds different sets of norms of communication depending on its specific cultural context. Within the context of English use within the multilingual setting of South Asia, for example, to communicate effectively, language users take into account not only the grammar of the language used in that society but also the grammar of culture of that society. **Grammar of culture** incorporates the acceptable possibilities of behavior within a particular culture that is expected in a given context. It is the grammar of culture that decides the form of linguistic behavior in any given situation (D'souza 1988; 1992). For India, for instance, the description of a grammar of culture includes that female speakers use cooperative discourse strategies so as not to threaten face (Valentine 1988), that the terms "please" and "thank you" are inappropriate responses to convey politeness (D'souza 1988), and that "no" can mean "yes". In other words, language and culture are interconnected; language cannot be separated from its cultural environment.

In terms of the research on politeness this means that what is considered polite in one society may not be considered polite in another, what is face threatening in one society may not be so in another, and so on. Hence, what may seem to be the most minimal differences in discourse strategies, such as the acts of disagreeing and agreeing, may lead to regrettable misperceptions of cooperation and sociability by those unaware of the meaning of these strategies. For example, when the Indian English speaker weighs both sides of an issue before stating her dissent she is strengthening her position not overworking the topic, when the Indian English speaker says no then agrees with the content of the previous turn, she is not sending contradicting messages, and, when the Indian English speaker repeats words and ideas, she is pleasing the positive face of her hearer, not showing tedium

and inconsistency. All these instances are examples of the kinds of face assumptions being different and the different means by which politeness is expressed in conversation by two cultures. In terms of what is happening in Indian English discourse, these users of English have developed their own distinct style of agreeing and disagreeing in this variety of English based on the awareness of face work and striving to satisfy the face of wants of others. In cross-cultural, cross-ethnic interactions, then, the chances for miscommunication increases.

In terms of the research on gender and politeness, the prevailing question remains: Do female speakers in general exhibit a higher occurrence of negative politeness and positive politeness strategies than male speakers? In order to answer this question, especially with regard to the strategies of agreeing and disagreeing, further study needs to be done. However, the evidence in this paper suggests that female and male speakers are not behaving the same interactionally; they approach politeness and the acts of agreeing and disagreeing differently. Two different communicative competences? Differences in grammars of culture? Research must seriously consider the effects due to the sex of the speaker and the sex of the addressee within the contexts of same and cross-sex conversations.

A final word of caution, however: assuming no means no and yes means yes in all cultural situations is not advisable. The music world would not be the same if instead of singing "yes, we have no bananas, we have no bananas today" we sang the lyrics "no, we have no bananas, we have no bananas today".

Notes

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[1] I have used the conventional transcription system in this paper. I have made note of different speakers by ordering each individual speaker as A, B, C,... ; there is no connection between speakers A, B, C,.... in all the examples. The f and m preceding the speaker denotes female and male, respectively. In other words, speaker mA refers to a male speaker A, fC refers to a female speaker C, and so on. I have emboldened parts of the conversation to illustrate certain points I make in the paper.

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